The Prisoner Employment Outcomes Project (PEOPle) Newsletter • September 2015

Project News

- We are pleased to advise that formal research approval has now been granted from Corrective Services in five jurisdictions to undertake the recidivism component of the project. The recidivism component involves the collection and analysis of comparative cross-jurisdictional data in order to provide insights into the extent to which successful completion of training and/or employment programs is related to positive employment and recidivism outcomes. We remain hopeful of gaining approval from Corrective Services in the remaining three jurisdictions.

- The process of obtaining university ethics approval to undertake up to twenty-two case studies is now underway. Each of the PEOPle case studies will be based on a single organisation/agency that provides Vocational Education and Training (VET) or employment services to ex-prisoners in all Australian jurisdictions. The purpose of these case studies is to provide a detailed, in-depth and contextual analysis of the training and employment landscape for people leaving prison. Organisations/agencies agreeing to participate will assist the project’s research team to identify the strengths and challenges of current approaches, as well as the conditions and elements for best practice models.

- The PEOPle’s two major literature reviews, ‘The Scholarly Literature Review’ and the ‘Review of Documents’, will be completed by the end of the year. Focusing on three key areas - Vocational Education and Training (VET); Employment; and Prison Industries - the reviews will provide a comprehensive assessment of Australian and international scholarly, peer-reviewed sources pertinent to approaches and models for supporting people completing correctional orders in their return to community, as well as all government and major institute inquiry reports, policy and program papers and
evaluations not available in the peer-reviewed literature. Once complete, the reviews will provide background and context for use in the remaining components of the project and for related project publications. They will also help to inform education and employment policy and program decision-making.

- The project’s research team was recently expanded with the welcomed inclusion of Dr Margaret Giles from Edith Cowan University as a Chief Investigator on the project. Dr Giles is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Business. Her research includes the 2007 Australian study of the importance of vocational education in prisons and a current study of the effectiveness of correctional education in adult prisons in Western Australia using a longitudinal dataset of WA prisoners constructed from linked state and federal databases. Margaret’s research looks at particular post-release labour market outcomes such as employment, welfare dependence, premature mortality and further study. Margaret has undertaken education and training program evaluations and education centre inspections in adult prisons in Western Australia and Victoria. Margaret has had prior teaching and research positions in public and private tertiary institutions in Western Australia and research, policy and planning positions in the Federal and State Governments and the not-for-profit sector.

- Adrian Darakai, an Honours student in Psychology at Deakin University has had 170 people complete his online survey about public and professional attitudes towards the employment of ex-offenders. Adrian will continue collecting data into next year, but would like to thank all who have participated in his survey thus far.

- On the 07th August 2015, the projects lead CI, Professor Eileen Baldry facilitated a panel discussion titled ‘Is there an Employment Future Beyond the Wall?’. The panel was held at the Reintegration Puzzle Conference in Brisbane. Professor Baldry was joined by panel members: Rebecca Kennedy (Correctional Educator, Queensland Corrective Services (QCS)); Dr Anna Macklin (QCS Education); Ruth Oakden (Senior Chaplain, Toll Group); Donna Faulkner (Executive Director, Work Solutions Gippsland); and Anne-Marie Tilly (Support Worker and ex-prisoner, Sisters Inside). The panelists addressed the variety of approaches taken across jurisdictions and highlighted some of the key challenges for different groups of prisoners and ex-prisoners in education, training and employment, as well as practical issues in the workplace for employers and ex-prisoner employees. Key outcomes of the discussion include the need to educate potential employers, the need to move toward a more integrated approach in
terms of funding, bureaucracy and delivery of service, and the need to resolve the issue of criminal record checks that discourage ex-prisoners from seeking employment and reduce the probability of ex-prisoners finding employment.

On 20th August 2015, Jenny Crosbie from Deakin University (a research officer on the project) co-presented with Donna Faulkner from Work Solutions Gippsland about the project at the Disability Employment Australia Conference. The conference, held in Sydney, attracted 350 delegates, primarily staff from disability employment services across Australia. The presentation outlined some of the key data about people who have disabilities in the prison system and then focused on the successful post-release employment program that Work Solutions Gippsland are running in conjunction with Fulham Prison in Sale, Victoria.

If you are new to the Project
Introducing the Prisoner Employment Outcomes Project

The Prisoner Employment Outcomes Project (PEOPlE) is a three-year Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project. The full title of the project is a ‘Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison’. The PEOPlE research team is optimistic about the beneficial relationship between ex-prisoners’ engagement in meaningful work; reductions in re-offending; and improvements in well-being. However, we are concerned by international and national evidence indicating the limited number of prison releasees who gain employment; the large number of prison releasees who have significant barriers to
employment, such as low levels of educational attainment, disability and complex support needs, and returning to communities with low employment opportunities. There is a paucity of research and understanding regarding successful pathways to employment for this group. With this in mind, the PEOPle research team aims to:

1. Improve current understandings of the models, practices, performance and outcomes of vocational, education and employment services;
2. Provide insights into the extent to which successful completions of training and/or employment programs is related to positive employment and recidivism outcomes; and
3. Develop a theoretical framework and practice models that are useful and appropriate to the development of future effective services.

To achieve these aims, the PEOPle team will gather and analyse, for the first time, comparative data from Australian jurisdictions on the relationship between in-prison and post-prison vocational education and employment programs, employment and recidivism. The research will draw on a mixed methods approach that will include: analysis of relevant data on prisoners involved in Corrective Services across a number of jurisdictions; a national survey of all Corrections, in prison vocational education providers, Correctional Industries, and relevant employment agencies regarding the type, size and nature of programs they run; qualitative interviews with staff of organisations involved in providing employment services to ex-prisoners, as well as interviews with ex-prisoners who are engaged with these organisations; the development of a number of case studies which will explore employment and training, as well as a wide range of contextual issues for ex-prisoners engaged with employment agencies; and analysis of data from two nested studies related to two groups significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system: Indigenous Australians, and those with an identified mental and/or cognitive disability.

The PEOPle brings together a group of people with extensive skills, knowledge and expertise, providing a unique partnership amongst key academics in the field, peak national bodies, correctional and employment organisations.
Meet the Team

Lead Chief Investigator
- Professor Eileen Baldry, UNSW
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UNSW Chief Investigators
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The PEOPle newsletter is designed to update stakeholders and interested parties in the project’s progress.
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